

Perceptions of individuals and organized stakeholders on immigrants' barriers to nature-based recreation

Anna Höglhammer, Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Austria, anna.hoeghlhammer@gmx.at

Andreas Muhar, Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Austria

Patricia Stokowski, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont, Burlington, USA

Thomas Schauppenlehner, Institute of Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Austria

Nature-based recreational areas provide important functions for today's society. In particular, for people living in dense urban areas, outdoor nature-based areas offer opportunities for recreation and relaxation and therefore support healthy lifestyles, thus contributing to the physical and mental wellbeing of their users. Such spaces are usually open for the general public, though several access barriers have been identified for different user groups. Immigrants from non-western countries are recognized to be underrepresented in larger recreational areas, though often these people are very visible in public parks in cities. This underrepresentation has been recognized by recent scholars (Jay et al., 2012; Kloek, Buijs, Boersema, & Schouten, 2013). "Forest Policy and Economics", page: "4-11", volume: "19", source: "Scopus", abstract: "Migration and growing ethnic diversity pose new questions for forest and nature policy and research, especially on the equality of access to natural areas. This paper compares national approaches in policy and research on ethnic minority groups' access to natural areas in four Western-European countries: the United Kingdom (UK), and several socio-economic, socio-spatial and ethnic cultural factors have been identified as determinants. As nature based recreation areas are often financed from public funds, decreasing such access barriers is a matter of social justice.

Project context

The Wienerwald Biosphere Park is located in the Austrian federal provinces of Vienna and Lower Austria. Its catchment area includes districts where local communities are characterized by a high number of people with migration background. Several ethnic communities are recognized to be underrepresented as user groups of the park. In Austria, as yet little research exists on barriers for immigrants from non-western countries in access to recreational areas and outdoor recreation. Therefore, a research project was initiated to investigate barriers in access to the Wienerwald Biosphere Park for people from the Turkish and the Chinese community in Vienna and Lower Austria (Höglhammer, Muhar, & Schauppenlehner, 2015). While socio-spatial barriers can be reduced by planners and the park management, socio-economic and ethnic-cultural influences are often addressed on an institutional level.

Thus, within the research project, interviews were conducted with both individuals from the Turkish and the Chinese community and representatives from institutions in the field of: (1) integration, (2) the park management and forestry sector, (3) cultural organizations of the two communities, and (4) health and sports associations. In total, 19 organized stakeholders and 80 individuals (40 from each ethnic community) participated in qualitative interviews.

Results

When comparing interviews with individuals and organized stakeholders, it becomes clear that different statements and perceptions about access barriers are offered by persons holding different roles with organizations. Our results show that on the level of organized stakeholders and park management, little knowledge exists about the actual needs or expectations of the communities concerning leisure and recreation. In contrast to this, interviews with individuals showed a strong appreciation of nature and of spending time in natural areas by people from both the Turkish and Chinese communities. The Wienerwald Biosphere Park is considered to be a suitable place for preferred activities, though it is often not considered due to its reputation communicated by park authorities.

Furthermore, the migration process itself was identified as having a considerable impact on leisure and outdoor recreation participation. Several barriers, such as personal stress and insecurities about the future, were identified in interviews with individuals. These barriers were also identified by most of the stakeholders as hindering outdoor recreation participation, though these were not connected to measures on an organizational or planning level. Within organizations working in the field of integration, a strong focus on language and labor could be recognized, though leisure is not an integral part of current integration policies. Simultaneously, if people's motivation for migration is labor, a strong focus on work often hinders people from thinking about leisure possibilities in the new country (Höglhammer et al., 2015). Leisure research itself has been predominantly Western-centric. This paper considers leisure within two ethnic communities (Turkish and Chinese).

Discussion

Our research project showed that for people with a migration background very specific socio-economic barriers exist, many influenced by the migration process itself. Specific preferences for leisure activities could not be traced back to ethnic backgrounds – though ethnicity has a strong influence on one's access to public land. As such, we conclude that different perceptions about leisure preferences due to one's ethnic background create stronger socio-economic and ethnic-cultural barriers on an organizational level than on an individual level. Involving communities in planning processes is seen as essential to break down barriers for these user groups, notably because this would also provide information about needs and preferences on a planning level. Furthermore, the cooperation between institutions representing different fields, especially including cultural associations from different communities, is necessary to increase access to outdoor recreation and thus to support healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, integration policy in today's increasing diverse

society should incorporate leisure as an important parameter and acknowledge the potential of areas such as the Wienerwald Biosphere Park for supporting identificational integration.



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